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## **Trachtenberg: School system must furlough workers or face cuts**

### **MCPS is only county agency not going along**

by Erin Cunningham and Marcus Moore | Staff Writers

Montgomery County Public Schools officials must furlough employees or risk having their budget cut by the County Council, Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg said Thursday.

Currently, the school system is the only county agency to spurn furloughs for its employees; however, its employees make up about two-thirds of all county workers.

If MCPS furloughed all its employees for five days, it would save \$33.7 million, according to data from council Staff Director Stephen B. Farber.

The school system's budget is \$2.2 billion in fiscal 2010.

"MCPS doesn't really want to play," said Trachtenberg (D-At-large) of North Bethesda. "We can't force the school system to apply a furlough plan. Obviously, we can reduce what we give to them in the way of funding, hoping they'll use furloughs as a way to realize savings."

The furlough issue was discussed Thursday at a meeting of the council's Management and Fiscal Policy Committee, which Trachtenberg chairs.

Under Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett's proposed \$4.3 billion budget, most county employees face 10 days of furloughs — saving \$15 million.

If all county employees were included, the same amount could be saved in 1.5 days.

Both Montgomery College and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission are developing furlough plans, Trachtenberg said.

The council is considering alternative furlough plans, including those that would require unpaid leave for school system employees. However, the decision to furlough MCPS employees is up to the county school board, which has resisted the idea.

"We have this little thing called maintenance of effort," said school board President Patricia B. O'Neill (Dist. 3) of Bethesda. By state law, maintenance of effort requires county school systems to spend at least as much on education as they did the previous year.

On Monday, the county will request a waiver of its maintenance-of-effort requirement for fiscal 2011. That waiver, according to county information, is for \$137.7 million. The school system already is making cuts in its budget, its employees aren't getting pay increases, and the system is increasing class size by one student, O'Neill said.

"For MCPS, the issue is not the ability to participate in an equitable furlough plan — the ability is clear beyond any doubt — it is the willingness to do so for the greater good," Farber said.

Trachtenberg said she is hopeful that MCPS and the council can work out a compromise in the next two weeks. The council will adopt a budget May 27.

Other jurisdictions have successfully furloughed school system employees — even without affecting classroom instruction, she said.

"Look at administrative people," Trachtenberg said. "There are people who work in central offices, librarians who could be furloughed. They aren't doing something that's specific to classroom instruction."